

# Community Character

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Community character is the identity of a place, as determined by the presence, type and quality of certain elements of the physical environment. It reflects the processes and forces that have affected a place's natural resources, economy, history and society through time. Describing the character of a community raises awareness of what makes a place unique, and is the basis for judging what elements of the community to preserve and celebrate. Often, this guides the creation of future zoning and design standards.

This chapter identifies character areas for the Town of Enfield. Character areas are broad generalizations about a community's natural and built environments. Character areas show parts of town that share similar physical characteristics, as well as parts that are unique. Character areas are defined through field observations and by reviewing maps and aerial photography. The characteristics observed to define character areas were: land use, density, setbacks, age of development, building style and materials, streetscape and landscape.

## Character Areas

Types of areas we have identified are Agricultural, Traditional Downtown, Big Box Retail and Office Complex, Suburban Residential, Industrial, Historic Village, Historic Estates, River Greenway, and Strip Commercial.

### *Agricultural*

The Town of Enfield has several agricultural areas. The largest agricultural area is located on the southeastern corner of town. It is roughly bounded on the north and west by the Scantic River, on the east by the Town of Somers, and on the south by the Town of East Windsor.

Tree nurseries and tobacco fields are common throughout Enfield's agricultural areas. However, there are many parcels that are not being farmed. Several of these properties contain large barns used on a seasonal basis for drying tobacco. Unfortunately, a few of them are vandalized with graffiti.

Roads in Enfield's agricultural areas have two lanes in opposite directions. There are no shoulders or sidewalks along the road. Truck traffic is quite common.

In addition to paved roads, agricultural areas east of Maple Street and Abbe Road are served by a north to south rail line. A private party is currently rehabilitating a portion of the railroad under a lease from the State.



**Figure 17 Reflecting a decline in economic conditions, a barn rests on an empty field covered with graffiti.**

Single-family houses are dispersed throughout most of the area. Commercial uses are limited.



Figure 18 Prosperous tobacco fields and tree nurseries in Enfield.

### *Traditional Downtown*

Enfield's downtown area roughly corresponds to the Thompsonville neighborhood. It is bounded on the east by I-91, on the west by the Connecticut River, and on the south by Rt. 190. The area extends north up to Montano Rd.

The downtown area has been described as a small town with a "walk around" scale and lots of historic character. Architectural styles prevalent in Thompsonville are Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne and Princess Anne, Colonial Revival, Neoclassical Revival, and Bungalow.

Housing at the very center of the area is at a higher density than in the rest of Enfield. However, there are still many single-family homes here. Other common land uses in this part of the downtown area include group homes and halfway houses; churches; social services; government offices; small offices; and bakeries, delis and small shops. There are also quite a few vacant lots.

Housing quality is in relatively good condition, but not to par with the quality of housing in the rest of the town. Residential properties west of the train tracks are more deteriorated. Further north, there are many remnant residential buildings next to commercial strip development from the 1950s. (See "Strip Commercial" section)



Figure 19 From top to bottom: Enfield Town Hall, Thompsonville Fire Department,

Most streets in Enfield's traditional downtown area have two lanes in opposite directions and sidewalks on both sides. Most parking is on the street as many houses lack an attached garage. North Main Street, which is the principal entrance to the neighborhood, stretches along Freshwater Brook, all the way to the Connecticut River. A multi-use pathway borders the brook and pond.

There are no good street level views of the Connecticut River from the center of downtown, and direct access to the waterfront is limited by the rail line and private property along the shoreline. There are several abandoned industrial buildings, and various utility infrastructure properties on the banks of the Connecticut River enclosed by chain link fences.



**Figure 20** View of two residential streets in Thompsonville.

### ***Big Box Retail and Office Complex***

The shopping mall and office complex area is bounded by Rt. 220 on the north, South Rd. to the south, and I-91 on the west. It extends east as far as Olmstead Rd.

Most commercial development in this area is of the “big box” kind, with large square or rectangular buildings similar to warehouses surrounded by large parking lots. Some buildings, particularly restaurants, have landscaping around the building. Some parking areas have trees spaced out throughout the lot.

There is no street grid or marked circulation pattern throughout the shopping areas, making vehicular access slow and confusing. Pedestrian circulation is also confusing as there are few sidewalks and marked crosswalks.

Office parks in the area have large building setbacks and campus-like landscaping. Access to the buildings is primarily vehicular, characterized by ample and sometimes winding driveways. Frequently, there is no direct pedestrian access from the street. In some cases, office buildings are not visible from the street.

There are several large forested areas and wetlands between each development, but there is no formal



**Figure 22** Shopping centers dedicate more land for parking than stores.



**Figure 22** The backside of shopping plazas facing forest and wetlands.



access to them as open space amenities. The back of each development is used as service entrance and loading area.

### ***Suburban Residential***

There are two Suburban areas in Enfield: one on the north, and the other on the south central part of town. The northern Suburban area is bounded by I-91 to the west, Rt. 220 to the south, Shaker Pine Lake to the east and the state line to the north. The south central Suburban area is bounded by the Scantic River to the east, the Town of East Windsor to the south, I-91 to the west, and South Road to the north.

Suburban residential areas are characterized by houses setback from the road by large lawns. Houses along the main road often lack sidewalks. The architectural style of housing varies by area, but it can be generally described as single-family housing with driveway. Multi-family housing is not common, but there are several elderly housing developments throughout the town.

Most streets have one lane in each direction. Above-ground utilities line one side of the road.



**Figure 23 Hartford Courant building in the office park on Phoenix Avenue**



**Figure 24 Views of streets in three of Enfield's suburban residential areas.**

### *Strip Commercial*

Enfield's main suburban commercial area is the area surrounding the northern segment of Enfield Street. It begins approximately from Brainard Road all the way to the boundary with Massachusetts.

While there is a mix of residential and commercial development, the area is predominantly residential. Commercial development has taken the shape of strip malls and car dealerships, which have expansive parking lots between the buildings and the road. Often, there are no sidewalks along the road. Where there is a sidewalk, there often lacks a path leading to the building, which forces pedestrians to cut across the lawn or between parked cars.

### *Industrial*

The Town of Enfield has two different Industrial areas. The first is located on the northeastern corner of town, and the second is located on the southwestern corner.

The one in the northern part has warehouses, several corporate headquarters, and a large prison complex made up by six correctional facilities. Roads in this area are two-lanes in opposite directions. There are no sidewalks.

The one in the southern part of the Town is a mix of warehouses, small office buildings, single-family homes and old farmsteads. There are many large tracts of land, some still in agricultural use. The railroad from Springfield to Hartford crosses the Connecticut River in this area. Enfield St. / Rt. 5 is the main local road in this area, and it is a two-lane road going in opposite directions with an occasional center turning lane. Sidewalks are sporadic. Interstate 91 is located east of Enfield St. and is the area's major regional road.

A significant amount of land in both Industrial Areas is prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance. Wetlands are also widespread here.



**Figure 25 Views of the northern segment of Enfield Street.**



**Figure 26 Industrial areas in Enfield's northeastern corner. Bottom picture shows correctional facilities on Rt. 220.**





**Figure 27 Industrial area in Enfield's southwestern corner. Top picture was taken at the Enfield - East Windsor town line.**

### *Historic Village*

The Historic Village area encompasses the Hazardville Center area and residential areas to the east up to Scitico. It is bounded on the south by the Scantic River and on the north by Moody Rd.

The streetscape along Hazard Avenue is quaint, and has small shops and mixed use buildings.

Hazard Avenue is the defining feature of the Hazardville neighborhood. It is a principal arterial, also known as Route 190, which runs east-west and connects local roads to the I-91. It is the only road that crosses the Connecticut River and provides access to Suffield. Development is most intense near Hazardville Center. The community has a small, main street feel near towards Somers, becoming more rural the farther east one goes.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 28 View of street approaching Hazard Avenue from North Maple St. Streetscape on Hazard Avenue looking west.**

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<sup>3</sup> Plan of Conservation and Development. 1999. Pg. 94

### Historic Estates

The Historic Estates area encompasses most of the middle section of Route 5/Enfield St. It begins south of Hazard Avenue and extends all the way south to King St. It includes the Enfield St. Historic District, and all the residential area west of Enfield St. up to the Connecticut River. Its eastern boundary is the I-91 and its northern boundary is Rt. 190.

Institutional and residential land uses predominate. The most common architectural styles are Federal, Greek Revival and Georgian Colonial. Houses are typically situated within large lots and set back considerably from the front. Landscaping in this area is predominantly wide, lush green lawns with large trees along the street and ornamental trees closer to the homes. Most houses are in fairly good condition, but several are in a bad state of disrepair.

Enfield St. is a two-lane road with traffic going in opposite directions, but sidewalks are not always continuous or on both sides.



Figure 29 View of Enfield Street looking north.

## Public Perception of the Town's Character

Throughout the entire duration of the POCD planning process, the Town of Enfield sought public comment through various means. Understanding residents' attitudes and opinions about the place they call home is fundamental to help define the character of the town. One of the issues about which people could comment was community character.

To date, public input reveals that the typical Enfield resident believes that Enfield is unique to Connecticut. Many people see the town as a small residential community with diverse neighborhoods and employment opportunities. They also see it as a place that is rich in historic, agricultural and aquatic resources. In fact, for many town residents, Enfield is special because of its location between the Connecticut and Scantic rivers. Unfortunately, the typical Enfield resident also feels that the Town does not capitalize on its natural resources, weakening the town's identity as a place where nature and industry coexist harmoniously.

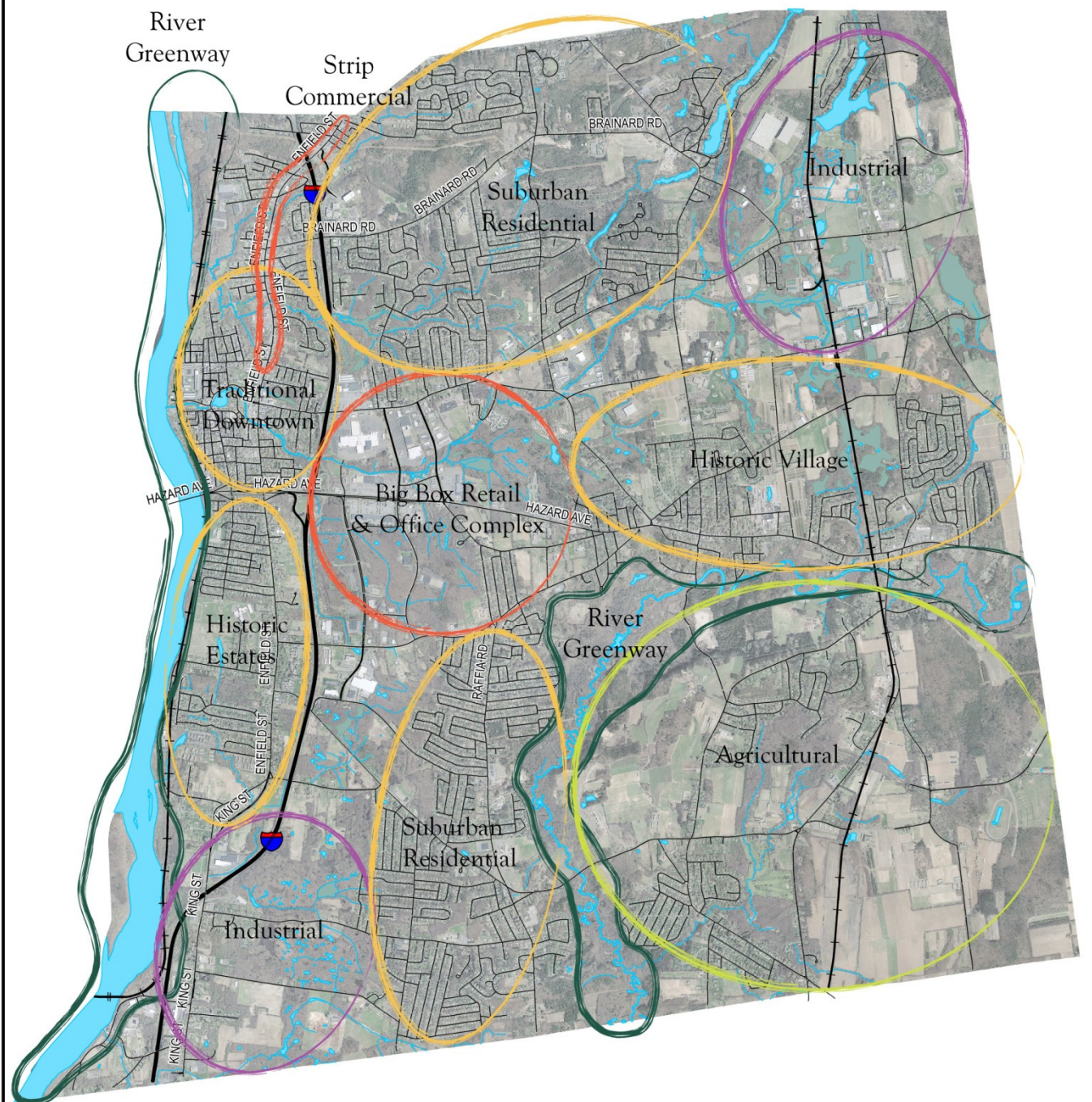
Many residents have pointed out that historically Enfield's character has been shaped precisely by this relationship. The town's physical organization has continuously evolved to suit the needs of the economic activities of the time, subject to the constraints of the natural environment. Today, however, Enfield's identity is noted to be slowly changing from a center of large industrial enterprises and modern corporate headquarters to a regional shopping location.

The town's location at the edge of two metropolitan areas and the junction of several major transportation routes helps to maintain Enfield's role in relationship to the surrounding towns; but it also brings heavy traffic that makes life in Enfield more stressful and difficult for pedestrians. Residents also noted that notwithstanding Enfield's accessibility, the town still lacks some feature that draw people off the highway even if they have no prior knowledge of the community.

## Findings

- Many parts of Enfield are not pedestrian or wheelchair accessible. Sidewalks are often missing along main local roadways, and sidewalks in residential areas are frequently interrupted. Bike lanes and pathways are largely inexistent townwide.
- Public access to the Connecticut River is limited due to predominance of private property along the waterfront. Another limitation for public access is rail line parallel to the shoreline. In addition, unattractive development along the waterfront encourages the perception of that the area is unsafe, which indirectly limits public access to the waterfront.
- Enfield's street design does not convey a strong sense of entering distinct or special parts of town, such as historic areas. Enfield lacks adequate signage to guide visitors to local attractions. While many historic buildings, cultural sites or open space areas that are open to the public are properly identified at the site, directions to them are not available at locations of high visibility throughout the town.
- There is a vast amount of vacant land in Enfield. Many of these areas are undeveloped forested lands or former agricultural fields that are reverting to meadows. Despite their unprotected status, they contribute to the rural character of some parts of town. Undeveloped lands close to urban areas have potential for open space and recreation, but they are often not integrated to existing development.
- The majority of suburban and rural residential areas in Enfield are in very good condition. They are characterized by single family homes at least two stories tall with well cared for lawns and trees. However, multi-family housing in these areas is limited.





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## Community Character

Plan of Conservation & Development - Town of Enfield, CT